

REMARKS

There remains pending in this application Claims 1-11, of which Claims 1 and 11 are independent. No claims have been added or cancelled.

In view of the above amendments and the following remarks, favorable reconsideration and allowance of the above application are respectfully sought.

Claim 4 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite for failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter which Applicants regard as the invention. In response, Applicants have amended Claim 4 in a manner believed to address and overcome the rejection.

The invention as set forth in independent Claim 1 is directed to a sheet post-processing device which comprises a conveying means, an intermediate stacking means having a pair of support members for supporting left and right edges of the sheet that is sent from the conveying means, the support members being capable of moving toward and away from each other in a direction that intersects a sheet conveying direction so that the sheet is pressed against one of the support members that serves as a reference and by the other support member to be positioned. Processing means are provided for processing the sheet positioned by the intermediate stacking means and delivery and stacking means are also provided for receiving the sheet that is dropped through a gap created between inner edges of the pair of support members which are moved away from each other. The invention is characterized in that the gap between the inner edges of the pair of support members in the direction that intersects the sheet conveying direction is narrower on a downstream side in the sheet conveying direction than on an upstream side when the support members are retracted from each other.

Independent Claim 1, as well as the corresponding dependent claims, have been amended to more clearly recite that the gap is created between the inner edges of the pair of support members. This feature is supported in the specification at least at page 26, line 14, and page 42, line 14.

Independent Claim 1, as well as dependent Claim 3 and 8-11, stands rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e), as being anticipated by Isobe, et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,661,995). In view of the above amendments and the reasons which follow, the rejection is respectfully traversed.

The present invention provides for a sheet post-processing apparatus which is arranged so that a gap between the inner edges of the pair of support members is narrower on a downstream side in the sheet conveying direction than on an upstream side. As a result of this combination of features, the present invention allows for the use of a common slide guide operation even when there are different discharge modes, and can improve sheet processing efficiency.

Isobe, et al. relates to a sheet processing apparatus having a pair of slide guides 301 and 302 which are movable in a direction that intersects a sheet conveying direction. In addition, the reference is capable of sheet processing at the support position by moving the pair of slide guides between the support position at which the gap between the edges of the sheet support surface is smaller than the width of the sheet and the retraction position at which the edges of the sheet support surface do not interfere with the convey sheet. However, as it is evident from Figure 4A of Isobe, et al., the inner edges of the slide guides of Isobe, et al. are conventional. The inner edge 346 having a linear shape is as described in the prior art of the

present application, and particularly the conventional intermediate stacking unit referred to on page 42, lines 12-26 of the present application. The reference is not understood to teach or suggest that the gap between the inner edges of the pair of support members in the direction that intersects the sheet conveying direction is narrower on a downstream side in the sheet conveying direction than on an upstream side in the sheet conveying direction when the support members are retracted apart from each other. Accordingly, it is respectfully submitted that independent Claim 1 is patentable over the applied reference.

The remaining claims in the above-identified application either depend from or incorporate the features of Claim 1 and are therefore patentable over the art of record for reasons noted above with respect to Claim 1. In addition, each recite features of the invention still further distinguishing them from the applied art. For example, it is noted that the Examiner has determined in the outstanding Official Action that at least Claims 2 and 4-7 recite patentable subject matter and would be allowable if rewritten in independent form. Given Applicants' position that Claim 1 is allowable, the dependent claims have not been rewritten into independent form at this time.

Applicants respectfully submit that all outstanding matters in this application have been addressed and that this application is in condition for allowance. Favorable reconsideration and early passage to issue of the above application are respectfully sought.

Applicants' undersigned attorney may be reached in our Washington, D.C. office by telephone at (202) 530-1010. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our below listed address.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'L. Stahl', written over a horizontal line.

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